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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GUANGZHOU 000147

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SUBJECT: A Generation Left Behind - Migrant Education in the Pearl River Delta

¶1. (U) Summary: How successful have Chinese government and educational officials been in meeting one of the major societal challenges confronting them, i.e., the care and training of the tens of millions of children of the migrant workers who have driven China's economic boom? Clearly the children's school attendance and academic performance are lower on average than that of other students. Even though Beijing has mandated that local governments provide education for the children of migrants, public schools generally give priority to local children due to limited space and funding. Private schools for migrant children in the Pearl River Delta are plentiful, but they are expensive, vary in quality and, for the most part, do not go beyond the ninth grade. End summary.

#### Left in the Village

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¶2. (U) Fifty-eight million children of migrant workers in China are left behind in their home villages when parents go to the cities to work. According to a 2006 survey by the All-China Women's Federation, a state sponsored NGO, these children are more likely than those whose parents have not sought employment elsewhere to have less than adequate supervision. Their caregivers, usually grandparents, often fail to enforce attendance in school. The survey showed that the academic performance of 80 percent of the migrant children was poor or mediocre; 20 percent had disciplinary problems.

¶3. (U) Children left behind also tend to begin school later and are more likely to drop out before completing the compulsory nine years of education. A different study in 2006 by the China National Children Center, an affiliate of the All-China Women's Federation, reported that as many as 60 percent of children left behind by migrant worker parents drop out of school before completing nine years.

#### Outnumbering Locals

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¶4. (U) According to the school attendance statistics of various municipalities of the Pearl River Delta, there are 1.5 million children of migrant workers enrolled in the region's schools. With the exception of Foshan, these students outnumber their local classmates in every municipality. These numbers are likely to grow as the Chinese government at all levels increase efforts to educate the children of migrant workers and more parents opt to bring their children with them when they leave home to seek work.

#### Public Schools - Second Class Citizens

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¶15. (SBU) Five years ago, Beijing mandated that local governments should provide nine years of free compulsory education to the children of migrant workers. However, according to Dr. Hong Wang, a professor at South China Normal University, local public schools do not welcome these children. Local students have priority for the limited spaces, and some municipalities impose additional residency requirements. According to another academic, local governments fear that open admissions would create a flood of students. The public schools also must deal with tensions in the classroom related to discrimination from local students and their parents.

¶16. (SBU) Wang told Congenoffs that migrant parents in Guangzhou need to establish residency by living in one place or having the same employer for several years. Only schools in the suburbs of Guangzhou have significant space for migrant children. In media reports, Hua Tongxu, Director General of the Guangzhou Education Bureau stated the city would spend RMB 12.5 million (about US\$1.76 million) this year educating 400,000 migrant children.

¶17. (U) In Dongguan, one of the Pearl River Delta's largest industrial centers, 300,000 local children have priority for spaces in public schools, according to the city's Department of Education. Officials say they are trying to expand the capacity of the public school system, but currently rely on private schools to educate most of the municipality's 430,000 migrant children. Other cities have been more successful at accommodating migrant children in public schools. According to the published statistics, migrant children account for half the public school population in Zhongshan and Zhuhai.

#### Private Schools - Out of Reach for Many

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¶18. (SBU) Private schools for migrant workers have sprung up throughout the Pearl River Delta, but according to Wang, these

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schools vary in quality. While some are quite good, others do not meet minimum educational and safety standards. Congenoff visited Dong An School in Dongguan, which serves 4,300 migrant children. Local officials selected Dong An School for the Congenoff's visit. It has received several awards from education authorities. However, Mai Liang Hui, Dong An's principal commented that many other migrant schools are substandard.

¶19. (SBU) Mai told us that private schools charge a minimum of 800 RMB per semester (about US\$110). In comparison, the average monthly wage of a migrant worker is around 1,000 RMB. There are very few scholarships available for migrant children. Paying such fees is easier for migrant workers who earn higher wages doing skilled work, those in supervisory positions, and double-income migrant families. However, Mai commented that even some workers with more modest incomes make the sacrifices necessary to send their children to private schools because they have few other options.

¶10. (U) Dongguan has 220 private schools supervised by the local Education Bureau. Eighty percent of them target migrant workers, operating as non-profit enterprises funded solely by tuition. Education Bureau officials say that with 50,000 to 80,000 more children arriving annually in Dongguan, more schools are needed. Funding for the Education Bureau is based on the number of local students, leaving the bureau with inadequate resources to monitor private schools.

#### Fewer Opportunities Beyond Ninth Grade

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¶11. (SBU) Wang and Mai both pointed out that there are fewer opportunities for the children of migrant workers to go beyond the nine years of compulsory education. The directive from the central government does not address more advanced education for migrant children. The Dong An School and the majority of private schools in Dongguan stop after the ninth year. Public schools, on the other hand, continue through twelve years of education.

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